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ABSTRACT

Through cooperation between language teachers and guidance counselors, the totality of student needs for present purposes and future directions can be served. This article reviews the relationship among counselors, students, and language instructors, describes their common goals, with emphasis on career guidance in its broadest definition, and enumerates practical steps to foster communication between counselors and teachers. A review of the purposes of career guidance programs already established in many states reveals a parallel rationale for foreign language study, including understanding of self and others, values clarification, problem-solving and decision-making, data-gathering and use, and personal planning. It is concluded that language teachers should develop programs that integrate their discipline into the total education program and reflect local, state, and national goals. It is the language teachers' responsibility to improve their relationship with counselors so as to gain their support and serve as a team in future programs. (NCR)

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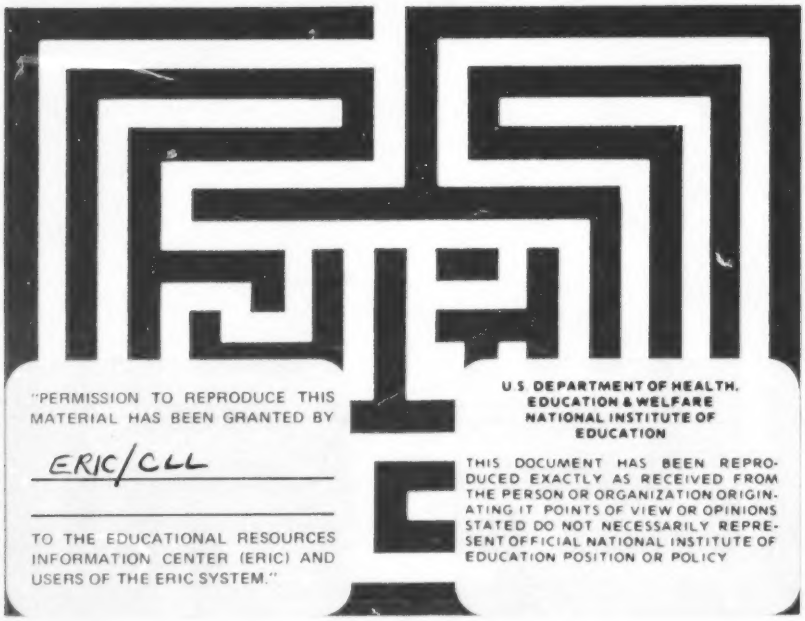
Helene Z. Loew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Working Together: Guidance Counselors and Foreign Language Teachers

Helene Z. Loew

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ABSTRACT Through cooperation between language teachers and guidance counselors, the totality of student needs for present purposes and future directions can be served. This article reviews the relationship among counselors, students, and language instructors; describes their common goals, with emphasis on career guidance in its broadest definition; and enumerates practical steps to foster communication between counselors and teachers.

Introduction

Educators continually try to strike a balance among past, present, and projected concerns in curriculum offerings and school services. Today there is a focus on a policy of services and education for all; goals, content, learning activities, and counseling stress the individual's development in a democratic social structure. The content and learning process of a discipline become resources in which the individual grows cognitively, aesthetically, and personally in an integrated manner. A school's counseling services reinforce this humanistic thrust toward the totality of student needs for present purposes and future directions. A major component of many programs on all educational levels today is career guidance, interpreted not in the narrow sense of vocational preparation, but in the broadest manner as work which recognizes the human and societal needs for productivity as part of meaningful life--whether accomplished as part of paid employment or as part of a person's leisure time volunteer activities.[1]

The Counselor and the Foreign Language Teacher

Mentioning guidance counselors to foreign language teachers often results in mixed remarks about the level of cooperation between the two. In many schools, counselors are blamed for declining foreign language enrollments; in others, teachers

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1. Kenneth B. Hoyt, Career Education: A Newsletter Series (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1975), p. 1.

detail methods of avoiding contact with counselors whenever possible. Success stories of cooperation and understanding are in the minority; negative encounters prevail.

Falling from a position of acceptance backed by federal funding in a matter of ten years has frustrated many language teachers who now have to defend their subject area and their positions. Language teachers once had primarily the best students in school, from whom they could demand and receive adherence to rigorous academic standards. Today many teachers have accepted everyone who is interested in language study, many of whom do not have the same aptitude and motivation as the highly selected students of the past.

The guidance counselor has also faced the same changes. Each time another societal movement challenges education, the guidance counselor has to adjust with a new set of goals and tasks. Often, too, guidance counselors as well as administrators have had to deal with an individual parent's dissatisfaction with school policy as it has affected his or her child.

Guidance personnel are not 'above' or 'below' teachers in the school hierarchy. Guidance counselors are equals. They are not administrators, nor do they earn more money for the same amount of time classroom teachers work in most school systems. They simply perform their tasks in a different setting and time frame, tasks in which language teachers should have greater participation. Consequently, foreign language teachers' attitudes toward guidance counselors must be the same positive ones they have toward teachers of other disciplines in the school. A negative attitude is not conducive to a healthy working relationship between language teacher and guidance counselor and must be eliminated, if possible, by better and more communication.

Each time a societal movement challenges education, the guidance counselor also has to adjust with a new set of goals and tasks.

FL teachers' attitudes toward guidance counselors must be the same positive ones they have toward teachers of other disciplines.

Goals of Today's Guidance Programs

In reviewing the goals of guidance programs and foreign language programs, strong similarities emerge. In many states, career guidance programs have been developed which are influenced by the constant changes in society and the task of teaching students how to meet these changes. Awareness of and coping with these changes require a balance among the talents and thoughts of many people: the thinkers and the doers, the planners and the workers, the artists and the technicians. Populations shift; cities change--resulting in social, economic, and financial problems. Young people, at the same time, need to find meaning and satisfaction in life, to establish themselves as unique persons, to provide for their needs, and to enable themselves to participate freely in our democratic society.

The purpose of a comprehensive, career-guidance program is to help each pupil acquire the skills, abilities, knowledge, and attitudes neces-

sary to develop and implement a personal, life-career plan. The program is designed to assist pupils in the development of skills in the key concepts of:[2]

Data-gathering and use: Ability to gather and use information about career opportunities and alternate career plans;
Understanding of self and others: Ability to recognize differences and similarities between self and others;
Values clarification: Ability to recognize one's values and their effect on personal behavior;
Problem-solving and decision-making: Ability to use knowledge and skills to choose among alternatives;
Personal planning: Ability to develop plans for the present and future, in and out of school.

This curriculum can be offered through classroom and small-group experiences and supported by counseling to assist pupils in the application of these skills. Guidance personnel carry the responsibility for leadership and coordination as well as delivery of services to individual students. Administrators, teachers, and support personnel assist in the implementation of this program.

Foreign language teachers, too, supply guidance counselors with data about individual students and use the information received from the guidance department to adjust teaching to students' needs. Teachers work with groups in their content area in career-guidance activities and support the program whenever possible in classroom procedures and activities. Language teachers can also assist students in learning how the content, concepts, and skills of language study could help them as they progress through their chosen career(s).

Goals of Today's Foreign Language Programs

A review of the purposes of career-guidance programs already established in many states reveals a parallel rationale for foreign language study: rapid changes leading to culture shock among our population, the combination of skills and attitudes to produce the thinkers and doers of the future, the necessity to find meaningful work, the use of leisure time, and the development of enlightened, involved, national and world citizens.

Language teachers should develop programs that integrate their discipline into the total educational program and reflect local, state, and national goals.

Key concepts involved in the acquisition of the skills and culture of a language other than one's mother tongue include:

Understanding of self and others: Ability to recognize contrasts with and similarities to self and persons of another culture and language; to develop personal interests through language study, e.g., travel, reading, photography, music, and art;
Values clarification: Ability to recognize one's values and their effect on personal behavior through contrastive studies of another people's culture;
Problem-solving and decision-making: Ability to use the knowledge and skills (as developed through reasoning skills inherent in language learning) to choose among alternatives, often exemplified in readings about another culture;
Data-gathering and use: Ability to gather and use information about long-range career opportunities which include practical language skills;
Personal planning: Ability to develop plans for the present and the future, in and out of school, especially through data-gathering on the use of foreign language as an ancillary skill in many careers today and in the future.

Cooperation

Just as language teachers are an integral part in a comprehensive career-guidance program, guidance counselors are of great importance in implementing our parallel goals for foreign language study. Philosophically, language teacher

2. Career Guidance: Foundation for the Future (Albany: N.Y. State Education Department, 1976), pp. 19-24.

and guidance counselor are on the same side, the student's side, the side of the best possible education which everyone can provide the student.[3] Practically, the barriers sometimes seem insurmountable. Often they have been built up over years of misunderstanding, frustration, and resentment.

Language teachers must be the ones to break down those barriers and communicate through a program of positive action with the guidance counselors as partners. The business of language is communication, after all. Language teachers have to be the assertive ones; no one else will or can take this first step. Go to the counselor and ask for some time to explain the language program, its goals, aspirations, problems; discuss the counselor's concerns about our discipline. Suggest how you might assist the counselor in the future (not only with the language program), and he or she may return the offer. Show your awareness of the demands on the counselor's time and energy; mutual awareness may already exist. Then, together, map out some possible procedures to follow immediately and on a long-term basis.

Language teachers
can also assist students
in learning how the content,
concepts, and skills
of language study
could help them as they progress
through their careers.

Offer to explain the language program to the entire guidance staff early in the year and again at scheduling time. Foreign language teachers often discuss their programs and goals only among themselves. Provide interesting and appealing written course descriptions to counselors and prospective students. An audience of counselors, students, parents, administrators, and the Board of Education would also benefit from such a presentation.

Language teachers should be good listeners as well. After explaining the program, there should be ample time and opportunity for counselors to discuss students' opinions and concerns about the foreign language program, motivation, testing, grades, and anything else that will further the progress of the language program. Explanations of the career-guidance program in the school and the language teacher's role would be appropriate here.

Send letters cosigned by guidance and foreign language personel to parents of children in key grades encouraging language study and including rationales for children with different interests and goals.

Develop, with the guidance department's assistance, programs that have special appeal and meaning for all students in your school. Begin by asking students early in the year how they view their language courses.[4] This may mean adding to or replacing some of your present courses which have limited appeal. Plan courses that will attract all interested students and will retain them until their needs are met: to enhance their communication and reasoning skills, to learn about themselves, and to discover others through a contrastive culture study.

Invite students in vocational courses to foreign language courses centered on useful skills and

3. Louise Paine, "The Counselor and the FL Teacher Are on the Same Side," Peals, 13, ii (1973), 3-4.

4. One instrument for polling student opinion is the Foreign Language Attitude Questionnaire (New York: Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1970). See also Sandra J. Savignon, Communicative Competence: An Experiment in Foreign Language Teaching (Philadelphia: Center for Curriculum Development, 1972), pp. 73-81. John Walker's "The Student View: Attitudes Toward Foreign Language Learning," in An Integrative Approach to Foreign Language Teaching: Choosing Among the Options. ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series, Volume 8, ed. Gilbert A. Jarvis (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook, 1976), 129-50, reviews the status of student evaluation of language programs and provides extensive references.

vocabulary for those vocational courses.

Be realistic in your demands for prerequisites, expectations, and outcomes. Conflicts arise when these expectations far exceed what most students in the course can accomplish, and guidance counselors are caught between the conflicting sides.

Invite guidance personnel to language department meetings on a regular basis, but especially when something pertinent to the guidance program will be discussed.

Suggest that a member of the guidance staff be assigned to the department as liaison. To have a counselor who is the guidance department's resource person for foreign language can only benefit both departments.

If possible, schedule interested language teachers to be in the guidance office for at least part of a day, while the counselor takes over the foreign language classroom. This could be a testing day or one with a reading/writing assignment if the counselor is not proficient in the language. More insight into the other's daily routine is likely after this experience.

Invite a counselor to your classes to see what language study is like today. It has probably been a while since the counselors have studied language on the secondary level.

Contact the counselor for the purpose of helping students with difficulties early in the semester when something positive can be done, rather than waiting until the matter is more difficult to solve. Students often have several problems at once, and early identification and assistance may save them for the year.

Be present at parent conferences where language is a major topic, to help support the counselor as well as the program. Again, what is happening in the language class may be symptomatic of a pattern in the student's total school program. The time spent often results in better understanding and adjustment on everyone's part.

Keep the student's guidance file current with accomplishments and provide documentation which might help the counselor assist the student in the future. Take a few minutes to talk personally to the counselor about these accomplishments or problems.

Cooperate with the guidance department in scheduling foreign language classes to promote flexibility and to avoid course conflicts.

Meet deadlines. If the guidance office asks for enrollment statistics, recommendations, applications, etc., be sure that they are submitted punctually. Your next request will be answered in kind when your deadline is pressing, and their cooperation is needed. For example, the guidance office is often an ideal place to begin a student survey on what languages might be offered in the future or for registering for special, language-related programs.

See that no student is dropped from or transferred to another language course without being interviewed by the teacher and/or foreign language department head. This procedure should be announced each year to all members of both departments and can result in the formalization of procedures by all departments. This system can work well to pinpoint weaknesses, e.g., the transition from junior to senior high school, and incorrect placement. Students also realize that someone cares about their foreign language problems and usually report this to the people who are ultimately concerned with the students' school career, their tax-paying parents.

The FL teacher should offer to discuss the language program with the entire guidance staff.

Offer to place all transfer students by interviewing each one. This avoids misplacement, rescheduling, and general confusion. When transcripts are not available or the previous language course has other letter or number designations,

Assist guidance counselors with the choice of colleges and technical schools for your students.

this involvement can be of assistance to all concerned. Students, of course, appreciate some personal attention, especially in a school they have just entered.

Assist guidance personnel in evaluating and assigning credits from summer study programs, trips abroad, or foreign schools, where translation of transcripts and correspondence is often necessary.

Advise students on language camps, foreign travel, and exchange and work programs. Start collecting materials on reputable programs by writing to the Institute of International Education, the Council on International Educational Exchange, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals,[5] among others. Let the guidance department know that you are able to serve as the school's resource person for this information, and then make students aware of the many reputable programs.

Verbalize and write your praise of the counselors, with copies to the administration. The effect of thanking those concerned for cooperation or for a special project which has been mutually developed is always positive.

Assist guidance counselors with the choice of two- and four-year colleges and technical schools for your junior and senior students. Keep abreast of good language programs at institutions your students may be attending. Potential language majors and minors depend on your advice as well as that of the counselor. If possible, arrange visits to the language department at local colleges; they are generally most hospitable. Career counseling is part of the language teacher's job, too.

Emphasize the career opportunities with foreign language skill plus economics, engineering, political science, secretarial skills, hotel administration, social work, travel agency administration, business administration, personnel management, auto mechanics, the medical field, etc. There are few jobs for those who know only foreign language(s) and have no other skills. Keep up-to-date with the job market, and give students the latest, most accurate information.

Develop bulletin board displays outside of the guidance office and in the foreign language area with job offers from the recent editions of the Sunday New York Times, for example, and have students keep this display current.

Present a slide presentation of such advertisements with explanation for your classes, for those not yet in foreign language study, and for the community.

Plan career days, weeks, or evenings, and invite community members who use foreign languages in their work as consultants and speakers. Arrange to have interested students visit these people at work as part of a career-exploration program.

Plan career-awareness units as early as possible in the language curriculum using the textbook as well as supplementary materials as springboards to an awareness of the world of work here and in the countries which they read and talk about in language classes.

Plan career experiences for students whenever possible, especially at the intermediate and advanced levels. Working part-time as an assistant in an elementary or middle school language program or as a peer tutor, as an aide in a local hospital where staff members and patients speak another language, or as a clerk or typist in an office where there is international correspondence in another language are all possibilities.

5. IIE, 809 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017; CIEE, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017; NASSP, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091. See also "Student Exchange Programs: Guidelines for Schools," Bulletin of the NASSP, 51 (1967), 96-116; and "Guidelines for Evaluating Foreign Language Programs Abroad for High School Students: A Reappraisal," ED 057 693.

The guidance department often has audiovisual presentations or kits which show people at different occupations. These can be stimuli for discussion in the target language about students' career aspirations and how foreign language is a potential skill when planning for the future.

Conclusion

These suggestions outline a possible cooperative program between the guidance counselor and foreign language teacher. Language teachers should develop programs that integrate their discipline into the total educational program and reflect local, state, and national goals. We cannot work in a vacuum: we teach children first, our discipline second. If any of us continues to ignore the importance of language study as an integral part of every child's total education, we are depriving large numbers of Americans of the many benefits that language study has to offer. We must develop varied courses that reflect this belief, courses that can be successfully completed by any interested student. We must show that our concern is for the lifetime career of each student, not only for a small part of his or her academic achievement.

Plan career-awareness units and career experiences for students whenever possible.

Under these premises, the guidance counselor could be one of our greatest supporters, since we would be serving as part of a team instead of pulling in opposite directions. It is up to language teachers to win the guidance counselors' support through our diverse programs, our good teaching, our humane and open attitude toward children, our total cooperation, and daily affirmation of a positive working relationship.

Sample Letter to a Parent from the Guidance Counselor

Dear Parent:

Recently, the guidance staff spoke with your child about the opportunity of studying a foreign language next year. I would like to share with you some of my reasons for encouraging such study.

Among the major benefits derived from taking a foreign language are the greater understanding and better use of English, the personal enjoyment and sense of accomplishment whether language skills are used for career purposes or personal development, and the awareness of one's own culture and values through the study of another culture.

I ask that you consider this program with your child, and I will schedule accordingly.

Very truly yours,

Counselor

Letter to a Guidance Counselor from the FL Department

Dear

The Foreign Language Department thanks you for your assistance in administering the recent National _____Test. Your cooperation has again given our students a greater opportunity to benefit from the language department's program.

We look forward to assisting you in the future.

Cordially,

Department Head
(Teacher)

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